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"It is the festival of guns, the carnival of misery": A Postcolonial Outlook on the Poetry of Martin Carter

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Abstract

This paper seeks to provide a postcolonial insight into the poetry of Martin Carter, one of the most significant poets of the Caribbean. To set the theoretical background of the study, the researcher presents the definition of postcolonialism, clarifies the time in which it emerged and developed as an influential trend of thought, and refers to the leading figures who have contributed to the development of the postcolonial canon, together with their great works that have established the solid foundation of the theory; in addition, the key features of postcolonial literature are outlined and elucidated. Then the researcher indicates, through discussing and analyzing Carter's poems, how these poems reflect the main principles of postcolonialism and reveal the chief characteristics of its literature. Outstandingly, Carter's poetry describes colonial life in Guyana, providing his fellow people with the spirit of resistance, the pride in a heroic past, the challenge of a colonized present, and the hope for a better future. In this way, his poems stand as a roadmap guiding the Guyanese to resist oppression, protest against the invaders, and put an end to the British colonization of their country through finding their expressive voice, rewriting their own history, and asserting their distinctive identity.

Keywords: Martin Carter, poetry, postcolonialism

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This is the dark time, my love.
It is the season of oppression, dark metal, and tears.
It is the festival of guns, the carnival of misery.
Everywhere the faces of men are strained and
anxious.

— (Carter, *Poems of Resistance* 17)

So writes Martin Carter (1927–1997), the most well-known Guianese poet and one of the greatest figures of Caribbean literature, whose vigorous poetry vividly depicts the pains and hopes of postcolonial Guyana. According to the poet, the British colonization of his country that lasted from 1814 to 1966 was 'a dark time', a time of war, extreme suffering, 'oppression, dark metal, and tears'. 'Guns' and artillery dominated the scene where 'the faces of men' were 'strained and anxious', worried about tomorrow and what it might have for them.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of postcolonialism as an influential trend of thought concerned with literature written in English by people of the countries that had been colonized by other countries or were still under colonization. As stated in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, a significant work on postcolonialism, 'post-colonial' is a term used to

cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression... So the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. (Ashcroft et al. 2).

Assuming that colonizers are not reliable narrators, postcolonial studies seek to give an accurate description of life in the colonies by allowing colonized people themselves to narrate the tales of their occupied countries.

To establish a clear understanding of what postcolonialism means, we need to define an essential related term, namely colonialism. Generally, colonialism refers to the idea that one country controls another. The alien country, the colonizer, seizes the land of the colonized one, exploits its resources, and subjugates its inhabitants, locking them with their colonizers in what Ania Loomba describes as "the most complex and traumatic

relationships in human history"(8). Postcolonialism, therefore, is the study of the consequences of this colonial rule on the life and culture of the colonized people.

Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha are the most well-known figures of postcolonialism. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Spivak's *In Other Worlds* (1987) and *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), and Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) are significant works that constitute the solid background of postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial literature has specific characteristics. Remarkably, it is a literature marked by a dominant voice of resistance. Though anger and protest are main features of postcolonial writings, a hopeful look runs throughout these writings promising for a better life for the victims of colonization. Furthermore, identity has a distinctive stance in postcolonial literature whose authors are greatly concerned with the pursuit of "an identity...submerged by the colonial impact" (Rothermund 31). Imperial powers not only aim to destroy the reality of the colonized and impose their own, but they also try hard to deform their identity and hinder its development. Hence, a main concern of postcolonial literature is to create a new reality for the colonized people and reconstruct their identity.

Related to the question of identity is the concept of Otherness, a central focus of postcolonialism which is mainly concerned with the relation of the colonizer to the colonized and its aftermath. Imperial discourses depict the Other (the colonized) as inferior, savage, and barbarian, unlike the Self (the colonizer) that is portrayed as superior, more civilized and more cultured. This notion of the Self and the Other is outstandingly discussed by Edward Said in his pioneering work, *Orientalism*, in which he describes "the relationship between Occident and Orient," that is, between the Self and the Other as "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5). For Said, Western culture and literature represent the Orient as "everything that the West is not, exotic, alien, dangerous, unreliable, to be tamed, exhibited, a threat to the West" (Moosavinia et al. 105). Reacting to this negative representation of the Other, postcolonial writers and critics have taken two essential steps. Firstly, they convincingly "expose the falsity and dangers inherent in imperial logic" (Neimneh 133). Secondly, they significantly allow the oppressed Other to have a powerful voice and attain a distinctive identity in their writings, therefore, drawing attention to a shared concern between postcolonialism and postmodernism; it is known that postmodernists primarily give voice and embodiment to the voiceless, the subjugated, and the marginalized, providing them with the opportunity to assert themselves and rewrite their own history.

An issue deserving special mention is that postcolonial literature celebrates hybridity, a term that generally refers to the efforts made by an

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individual or a group of people to assert a balance among the customs and practices of two or more dissimilar cultures. For example, people who migrate to other countries find themselves confronted with this issue as they try to adjust to the traditions and values of a new society while sticking to the principles and experiences of their native culture. This concept of cultural hybridity obviously applies to the postcolonial sphere where two different cultures exist, "that of the coloniser, through a colonial school system," Peter Barry states, "and that of the colonised, through local and oral traditions" (199). Barry points out another important characteristic of postcolonial literature, specifically its rejection of "the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature," simply because "if we claim that great literature has a timeless and universal significance, we thereby demote or disregard cultural, social, regional, and national differences in experience and outlook" (192-199).

Martin Carter's poetry reflects the postcolonial canon in a clear way. Spending all his life in his beloved country, Carter never sought exile outside Guyana preferring to participate in the Guianese struggle against imperialism in the hope of seeing his nation free and independent. Accordingly, his poems expressively describe the era of the British colonization of Guyana, investigate its political, social and cultural impact on Guianese society, and reveal the response of his colonized people to the alien colonizers. As Carter indicates in his poetry, colonization was a 'dark' period that not only dismayed people and snatched happiness out of their lives, but also saddened nature and kept it miserable in every part of Guyana where

All round the land brown beetles crawl about.
The shining sun is hidden in the sky.
Red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow.
(*Poems of Succession* 42)

As the lines reveal, the colonizers 'crawl' like 'brown beetles' robbing meaning out of the Guyanese life and destroying everything beautiful 'all round the land'. The depiction of these invaders as 'brown beetles' that move slowly from one place to another in full secrecy reflects how mean and dishonest they are. Skillfully, the poet gives us an example of personification in the second line showing how the 'shining sun' sadly withdraws from the scene and 'hides in the sky', unable to endure the daily decay of life in Guyanese society at the hands of the brutal conquerors. Similarly, 'red flowers' are personified in the third line bending 'their heads' as a sign of deep 'sorrow' for the Guyanese and the plight they undergo under colonial control. Expressively, the lines imply how nature sympathizes with human beings, reflecting their grief and distress.

Resistance, anger, and protest, which remarkably characterize postcolonial literature, are essential features of Carter's poetry. It is worth mentioning that Carter was a famous activist and a notable leader in the political scene of Guyana, struggling hard with his fellow Guyanese people against imperial powers until the country attained independence in 1966. That is why he was arrested and imprisoned twice by the British colonial troops, in October 1953 and in June 1954. His poems, particularly those included in his collection *Poems of Resistance*, have been so famous that the masses recited them in the political uprisings and public demonstrations against the British. An interesting poem in the *Poems of Resistance* collection is 'I Clench my Fist' in which Carter, amidst what he describes as 'the festival of guns', daringly addresses the British soldiers stating:

Although you come in thousands from the sea
 Although you walk like locusts in the street
 Although you point your gun straight at my heart
 I clench my fist above my head; I sing my song of Freedom!
 (26)

Challenging the invaders who come to seize his land, the poet asserts that he and his fellow people will face the enemy and will never give up the resistance spirit that urges them to fight and stand firm to the end. Though consisting of four lines only, the above stanza is highly rich in its poetic techniques.

Repetition, simile, apostrophe, enjambment, alliteration, and consonance are cleverly used by the poet in a way that reflects the idea he poses and enriches the strong voice he adopts. The repetition of the word 'although' three successive times reveals that the difficulties confronting the Guyanese fighters are numerous and challenging: Firstly, the British invaders come 'from the sea' in huge numbers. Secondly, their military forces spread everywhere like 'locusts'. Thirdly, the British soldiers directly 'point' their guns 'straight at' the 'heart' of anyone who obstructs their progress into the Guyanese land. Nevertheless, the poet and his people are determined to overcome all difficulties and face all challenges until they can finally achieve victory and 'sing' their 'song of Freedom' as Carter confidently declares. Simile is used in the second line in a brilliant manner; the poet compares the British warriors to 'locusts', those insects that fly in huge groups destroying the crops and plants; this portrayal reflects the idea that the conquerors' army has enormous numbers of soldiers that move in large groups and harshly wipe out everything they meet in their way. Besides, the employment of apostrophe in the first three lines not only shows that the poet speaks to the British invaders, but it also characterizes his address with boldness, confidence, and determination to confront these colonizers with assertive power of fight and resistance. Besides, the instance

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of enjambment that can be noted from the first line up to the last one reveals the continuity of the Guyanese people's struggle and indicates that the speaker and his companions, despite all the advantages which the conquerors possess, will never stop fighting and defending their country. Finally, the use of alliteration and consonance in the final line where the two words 'sing' and 'song' start with the same consonant /s/ and also end with the same consonant /g/ is very suggestive; this, of course, gives music to the lines and, one imagines, rewards the speaker at the end of the battle with that precious 'song of Freedom' after the terrible hardships he and his people have endured in their struggle against the foreign invaders.

Carter's poetry is best read as an angry protest against colonization and its destructive effects on society. It was Carter who "established the word 'resistance' within the vocabulary of the independence movement in Guyana and became known as the country's protest poet" (Robinson 36). Accordingly, the poems written by this rebellious poet vividly reveal how the British colonizers not only get hold of the Guyanese land but also hinder the flow of life in it. This meaning is revealed in "This is The Dark Time, My Love", a poem in which Carter angrily cries out:

Who comes walking in the dark night time?
Whose boot of steel tramps down the slender grass?
It is the man of death, my love, the strange invader
watching you sleep and aiming at your dream.
(*Poems of Resistance* 17)

Directing his questions to his wife Phyllis who, in this poem, stands for all the Guyanese, Carter asks who secretly comes in the darkness of night to seize the land and steal it from its original inhabitants. The poet's interrogative speech continues inquiring about the person who comes with his 'boot of steel' and tramples 'the slender grass'. Not waiting until his addressee replies to the raised questions, the poet immediately gives the answers because the culprit is known to everyone; it is the 'strange invader', the poet clarifies, who creates that chaos, suppresses nature, oppresses people, spreads fear 'everywhere', destroys gorgeous things, and disfigures the beauty of the land. More importantly, the colonizer mercilessly kills life in the souls of the Guyanese people and deliberately aims at preventing them even from dreaming of a better future. Describing 'the invader' as 'the man of death' implies how brutal and bloodthirsty he is. Even, 'the slender grass', the symbol of peaceful nature, falls prey to the cruelty of that pitiless colonizer.

Witnessing these agonies in Guyanese society where the powerless citizens are daily victimized and their human dignity is openly violated in

what the poet calls 'the carnival of misery', Carter makes up his mind not to keep silent and to set the 'fire' of revolution against the British oppressors. This tone of rage and rebellion is revealed in his poem 'Looking at Your Hands' in which he decisively declares:

No!
 I will not still my voice!
 I have
 too much to claim—
 if you see me
 looking at books
 or coming to your house
 or walking in the sun
 know that I look for fire!
 (*The Hill of Fire Glows Red* 9)

The poem opens with the word 'no' which reflects the poet's categorical rejection to mute his resisting voice in the struggle against the British colonization of his country. He affirms that he will react very violently to these cruel colonizers who subjugate his people and sow the seeds of despair everywhere in Guyana. He 'still' has many actions to take. Therefore, he addresses his fellow people telling them that if they, one day, see him busy reading 'books', knocking at the doors of their houses, or roaming over the streets in the hot 'sun', they should then know that he is searching for 'fire' in order to ignite the fight against the conquerors.

Thus, Carter in the above stanza specifies three sources in which he explores the spirit of revolt and resistance symbolized by the 'fire' he looks for. Firstly, he may examine 'the books', most likely of poetry to find the most vigorous poems that powerfully stir the enthusiasm of the masses to rebel against those who dominate their land. Secondly, he may go to the houses of the Guyanese as they are the actual owners of the place and the authentic players of the symphony of resistance and liberation; hence they need someone, like the poet who now speaks for all the people of Guyana, to encourage them to take serious steps and unite 'their hands', hearts, and goals in order to be able to dismiss the colonizers out of their country. Thirdly, the poet may also resort to 'the sun', with its implications of heat and light, to find the 'fire' of rebellion which he seeks. Significantly, the repetition of the first person singular pronoun 'I' three times in the above-quoted stanza asserts the speaker's determination and ability to accomplish the actions he has in his mind. Moreover, the use of enjambment that starts at the fifth line and goes on until the ninth and final one suggests that the speaker will not stop his search for his target, namely 'fire', unless he finds it.

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Unable to put out the 'fire' emitted from Carter's protest poems, the colonizers find no solution but to imprison the poet. Nevertheless, his angry voice never weakens; quite the opposite, it gets stronger and stronger passing the walls of the prison to reach the Guyanese everywhere, urging them to continue their revolt against the conquerors. Recalling this bitter experience of imprisonment which colonial authoritarianism has imposed on him, Carter narrates:

This is what they do with me
Put me in prison, hide me away
cut off the world, cut out the sun
darken the land, blacken the flower
stifle my breath and hope that I die!

(Selected Poems 87)

In an attempt to silence the poet, the colonizers jail him, separate him from his family, from his friends, and, more importantly, from the angry masses outside the walls of the prison. They also control nature and prevent its elements from functioning appropriately. So, the poet sadly points out how the dirty hands of these invaders 'cut out the sun / darken the land' and 'blacken the flower'. What these conquerors yearn for is killing the poet and consequently stifling his 'breath' by suffocating and muting his voice of resistance that always disturbs and threatens them. Expressively, Carter uses diction to reflect the awfulness of the experience of imprisonment he has undergone. The verbs 'hide away', 'cut off', 'cut out', 'darken', 'blacken', and 'stifle' all reveal the harshness and brutality of the British oppressors as well as the violent actions they take to repress the poet and keep him down. Besides, throughout the lines cited above, the poet employs the pronoun 'they' to refer to the British colonizers without explicitly saying 'invaders', 'colonizers', 'conquerors', or the like; he probably does so in order to show his scorn of these tyrants who, according to him, do not deserve to be overtly mentioned in his poetry.

An important dimension of the postcolonial canon in Carter's poetry is the poet's quest for a Guyanese identity which the colonizers have tried hard to shatter, deform, and erase. Here, the poet's mission lies in reconstructing this identity through enhancing the national feeling of his people and reminding them of their history, the primary source of their integral identity, which has deliberately been suppressed and concealed by the colonial system in Guyana. Feeling proud of his brave ancestors who keep 'groaning' in their graves with 'fire' in their 'eyes' to terrify the invaders, Carter warns the colonial army:

British soldier, man in khaki
 Careful how you walk
 My dead ancestor Accabreh
 Is groaning in his grave
 At night he wakes and watches
 With fire in his eyes
 Because you march upon his breast
 And stamp upon his heart.

(*University of Hunger* 100)

Seeking an authentic identity whose roots go deep into the Guyanese past, Carter creates a connection between past and present summoning the rage of his eighteenth-century rebel ancestor Accabreh. The great forebear is disturbed 'in his grave' by the British soldiers who indifferently 'march upon his breast' and strongly tread 'upon his heart' as a sign of disrespect and humiliation, not knowing that he 'wakes and watches' at nighttime, taking the form of a frightening ghost. 'With fire in his eyes', the 'dead ancestor' stands as a direct threat to the imperial powers implying that he will unhesitatingly destroy anyone who may think of approaching his land and will definitely pass his anger to his descendants so that they can confront and defeat their enemies.

Carter masterfully employs technique in a way that reflects his themes and ideas. For example, the allusion to 'Accabreh' as a great heroic ancestor from the past strengthens the link the poet establishes between past and present, making it more convincing and effective. It also evokes the people's national consciousness of their history and stirs up their enthusiasm, interest, and pride in the nation's ancient heroes. All this undoubtedly contributes to the total process of asserting the Guyanese identity which the poet attempts to restore and reconstruct. Besides, it is noted that Carter uses the word 'khaki' which refers to that dark yellowish-green or light yellowish-brown uniform that is often worn by soldiers. That the British soldier is described as a 'man in khaki' shows how contemptuous the poet is towards the British army whose warriors are always dressed 'in khaki' as if they were fighting, murdering, conquering, and attacking others all the time. That is why the poet, in the same poem, curses these soldiers describing them as bloody people who are fond of killing and invasion:

I know your hands are red with Korean blood
 I know your finger trembles on a trigger
 And yet I curse you – Stranger khaki clad.

(*University of Hunger* 100)

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Supported by the forefathers who readily come from the past to take part in their descendants' contemporary struggle against colonialism, the speaker in Carter's poetry feels grateful, confident, and empowered. The poet is entirely sure that following in the footsteps of the ancestors will lead to victory. So, he proudly declares in his poem 'I Come from the Nigger Yard' that he is the successor of slave ancestors whose 'agony', 'pain' and endurance continuously provide him with the power he needs to resist and fight the invaders:

I come from the nigger yard of yesterday
leaping from the oppressors' hate
and the scorn of myself;
from the agony of the dark hut in the shadow
and the hurt of things;
from the long days of cruelty and the long nights of pain
down to the wide streets of to-morrow, of the next day
leaping I come, who cannot see will hear. (*Poems* 33)

Acting as the spokesperson for all the Guyanese, the poet tells his readers how he travels into the past via the vehicle of history in search of the roots of his Guyanese identity. Proud of being a descendant of slave forebears, he reaches 'the yard of yesterday' in the hope that he can get the spiritual support he needs to continue the struggle against the conquerors of his country and see how the forefathers acted in such hard times. In the land of the ancestors, the poet observes how these brave slaves could daringly challenge 'the oppressor's hate' and how they could amazingly endure 'the agony of the dark hut' / and the hurt of things'. He also watches how the forefathers could patiently 'pass' 'the long days of cruelty and the long nights of pain'. The poet comes back to the land of the present fully convinced that the Guyanese, in order to overcome their colonizers, should take their ancestors as a model for staying firm and powerful in the face of hardships. They should consequently ignite the flames of resistance against their enemy until they can eventually drive every soldier of the British colonial army out of Guyana.

As shown in the lines quoted above, Carter's use of the verb 'leap' in the gerund form connects past, present, and future together. More importantly, it reveals the strong will and keenness of the speaker to move continuously and quickly from an era to another carrying with him the dreams of change and independence. Armed with a genuine Guyanese identity that is asserted by the wisdom and experience of his ancestors, he is shown 'leaping' from an oppressed, yet challenging, past 'down to the wide streets of to-morrow, of the next day' with full determination to alter the

present and future reality of his colonized country. The last line carries a strong message to the colonial power in Guyana: the speaker confidently announces that he does 'come' back from his journey to the past and now he is going to bring about the necessary change through which the British conquerors will be defeated, driven out, and taught a lesson they will never forget. He will do so, and 'who cannot see will hear'. Thus, Carter finds in the past and history of his country the tools that help him to restore, reconstruct, and assert the identity of his Guyanese people through his verse.

The concept of Otherness, a focal point for postcolonial writers, is clearly revealed in Carter's poetry. As indicated previously, "colonizers assume themselves as the superior race and consequently this assumption affects the ways which they treat the colonized" (qtd. in Mozaffari 507). In his poetry, Carter elucidates how the British colonialists dominate, degrade, and oppress the Guyanese people, regarding them as the inferior other. The consequences of this western ideology on people and society in Guyana have been frustrating and destructive. The helpless citizens who are viewed by the colonial system as the savage other that must 'be tamed' are forced to live in what the poet describes as 'the dark time', 'the season of oppression', and 'the carnival of misery' where the brutal colonizers, Carter writes, "watch us and lick their tongues like beasts / who crouch to prey upon some little child" (*University of Hunger* 92). The ancestor Accabreh bitterly groans in his grave because the British soldiers inhumanely walk on his dead body as an oppressive act against him and against all the Guyanese as well. Even nature itself becomes the subjugated other and falls under direct threat as the domineering conquerors do their best to 'darken the land' and 'blacken the flower', as mentioned earlier. In brief, no creature all over Guyana, human or nonhuman, could escape that 'oppressors' hate'.

As a postcolonial writer and as one of the Guyanese people, Carter resists this negative way in which the colonial mind conceives and represents the other. He does so by showing the distinctive qualities of the oppressed people in his poetry and by giving them a powerful voice to express themselves and assert their identity. Marvelously, Carter's poetry shows how the oppressed Guyanese land wants to speak and express itself as if it needs the poet, the spokesperson for the oppressed in Guyana, to provide it with an expressive voice. This is what the poet observes and narrates in his poem 'Listening to the Land':

I bent down
Kneeling on my knee
and pressed my ear to listen to the land.
.....
and all I heard was tongueless whispering
as if some buried slave wanted to speak again.

(*Poems* 8)

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Responding to the request of his adored, subjugated land that now stands for all the people of Guyana, the poet immediately 'bent down / Kneeling on' his 'knee' and closely 'pressed' his 'ear to listen to' what the land wanted to say to him. It seems that his 'buried slave' forefathers had the desire to speak and tell him something. So weak and so repressed was the voice of the land and its buried people that the poet could not interpret what had been said. However, the poet got the message and fully grasped it though the speech was mere 'tongueless whispering'; the land needed to speak and have a powerful voice in order to be able to react to the plight of its Guyanese people. Significantly, the lines imply that the past is not dead, inactive, or silent; it is always alive, energetic, and ready to 'speak again' in order to provide the present generations with the strength and inspiration they may need in their struggle against the enemies of the nation.

The second line is very expressive containing an example of alliteration and another of assonance; the two words 'kneeling' and 'knee' alliterate together as both of them start with the same consonant /n/, and at the same time they create an example of assonance as both contain the vowel /i:/. Alliteration and assonance give music to the line and, more importantly, connect the two words together to point out that the speaker not only 'bent down' as he had done in the first line, but he also knelt 'on his knee' in a highly meaningful act of respect and esteem for his land. This feeling of respect shown by the speaker towards the land is supported by the instance of enjambment in the first three lines, which reflects the speaker's quick response and successive, non-stop actions of bending down, kneeling, and pressing his ear to the ground, in order to respond to the land and carry out its request at once.

After listening to the voice of the oppressed past and helping its inhabitants to 'speak again', Carter moves to the present of his colonized country, giving voice to the subjugated Guyanese so that they can express themselves, emphasize their identity, and bring about the change they all yearn for, basically because he is one of these people as he proudly proclaims in his poetry; in his own words, "I am a man living among my people / Proud as the tree the axeman cannot tumble- / So if my people live I too must live / And they will live, I tell you they will live (*Selected Poems* 87). Calling upon one of his companions in distress who represents all the oppressed Guyanese, the poet emerges as a lifeline and a source of empowerment helping his dominated people create an existence and find a voice amidst 'the dark gloom' of colonization:

Give me your hand comrade
Do not cry little one, do not cry.
This is the bond we make in the dark gloom about us

Hand in hand! Heart in heart! Strength in strength!

.....
 On high the scarlet banner flies aloft
 Below the earth re-echoes liberty! (*Poems of Succession* 43)

The use of apostrophe at the very beginning of the above lines indicates how close and concerned the poet is about his fellow people as he speaks to them, lends them a hand in difficult times, plucks despair out of their souls, and instills hope inside their hearts. He asks his desperate 'comrade' to stop crying, resist oppression, and join his fellow Guyanese protesters who are now creating a new reality for their country. Carter not only speaks for his people expressing their deep woes and great aspirations, but he also draws their attention to the strong 'bond' that joins all the Guyanese together, 'Hand in hand! Heart in heart! Strength in strength!' Only through unity can they stand against the British and achieve triumph over them. Once they are unified, the people of Guyana can open their eyes to recognize how the world waits to see them defeating their enemy and overcoming its colonial army.

Noticeably, crimson banners are seen flying high in the sky as a sign of hope, happiness, and optimism; likewise, the earth beneath is observed echoing the songs of freedom and the dreams of self-determination as an indication that the long-sought moment of independence is about to take place. The contrast between 'high' and 'below' in the last two lines implies that the sense of delight and hopefulness spreads all over Guyana including all the distance between the sky and the earth. The opening line 'Give me your hand comrade' reminds one of 'A Banner for the Revolution', a highly expressive poem in which Carter states,

This is my hand
 for the revolution...
 that night there will be thousands of torches
 from the hospitals the lame will come
 the mad will be sane again
 for the revolution.
 (*University of Hunger* 94).

Uniting the 'hands and hearts' of all the Guyanese in the revolution against the colonizers, Carter positively portrays the oppressed people in his poetry, providing them with voice and power to change the political scene and liberate their colonized country. He is now full of hope and confidence that a promising day of liberty is being woven by the very hands of his fellow people who are now able to rewrite their own history and assert their distinctive identity. The poet is completely sure that this "day will come," he

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asserts, " If I do not live to see that day / My son will see it. / If he does not see that day / His son will see it" (*Selected Poems* 87). Luckily, the poet himself did 'see that day' as his country gained independence on May 26, 1966. Martin Carter died in 1997, and since then people throughout Guyana and the Caribbean region have memorized his eternal words that spread hope everywhere:

Dew is awake
Morning is soon
Mankind is risen
Flowers will bloom.
(*Poems* 14).

Postcolonial in its nature and outlook, Carter's poetry stands as an explicit rejection of the notion of the universalism in literature which affirms that some literatures are so grand that they achieve a universal stance for all people throughout ages. The poet is fully aware of the fact that colonial powers rely in their construction on 'the assumption of universalism' because, as the editors of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* point out, "the 'universal' features of humanity are the characteristics of those who occupy positions of political dominance. It is these people who are 'human', who have a legitimate history, who live in 'the world'" (Ashcroft et al. 71). Like other postcolonial writers and critics, Carter strongly reacts to this notion emphasizing the uniqueness of the cultural and social reality of his postcolonial society. His poetry can deservedly be regarded as a roadmap for the Guyanese people guiding them to find their expressive voice, rewrite their own history, assert their unique culture, and regain their distinctive identity. In so doing, they are able to "stand as dignified people" and "see their history in their very own cultural perspectives" (Choudhury 134).

In conclusion, this paper has presented a reading of Carter's poetry from a postcolonial standpoint, showing how it reflects the main principles of postcolonial theory and literature. As argued above, voices of resistance, protest, dissent, anger, and hope that form the main features of the postcolonial thought are unmistakably heard in the poems written by this eminent writer. Outstandingly, the quest for a distinctive Guyanese identity and the positive representation of the oppressed other whose image has always been deformed by western discourses emerge as key issues in Carter's poetry. In addition, the postcolonial rejection of the idea of literature universalism is evident in his poems. Indeed, Carter's poetry has wonderfully addressed the hearts and minds of the Guyanese people,

teaching them how to dream and, more importantly, how their dream can 'change the world':

And so
if you see me
looking at your hands
listening when you speak
marching in your ranks
you must know
I do not sleep to dream,
but dream to change the world.

(The Hill of Fire Glows Red 9)

المستخلص:

"إنه مهرجان البنادق، كرنفال الشقاء": نظرة ما بعد كولونيلية في شعر مارتن كارتر

عبد المحسن إبراهيم هاشم

يتناول هذا البحث شعر مارتن كارتر من وجهة نظر ما بعد كولونيلية حيث يحدد الباحث في البداية الإطار النظري للدراسة ملقياً الضوء على تعريف مصطلح "ما بعد الكولونيلية" وما يرتبط به من مفاهيم وتعريفات، وكذلك تاريخ ظهور هذه النظرية وتطورها كأسلوب فكري له طابعه الفلسفي والثقافي والأدبي المميز. ويشير الباحث أيضاً إلى أهم الرواد والمفكرين الذين أرسوا أصول هذه النظرية وساهموا في تطويرها، مفصلاً القول في سمات أدب ما بعد الكولونيلية وشرح خصائصه. ومن خلال مناقشة وتحليل القصائد التي كتبها كارتر بشكلٍ مستفيض، يوضح الباحث كيف أن هذه القصائد تعكس مبادئ نظرية ما بعد الكولونيلية وتبرز خصائص الأدب المرتبط بها. إن ما يميز شعر كارتر هو الوصف الدقيق والشامل للحياة في غيانا أثناء وقوعها تحت سيطرة الاستعمار البريطاني وما عاناه شعبها تحت وطأة هذا الاحتلال الجائر، حيث يغرس الشاعر في شعبه روح المقاومة والقتال، والاعتزاز بماضٍ تليد، وتحدي حاضر مهزوم، والأمل في مستقبلٍ واعدٍ يضم الجراح ويفتح آفاقاً جديدة نحو حياة أفضل. وتصور قصائد كارتر بشكل بارع ومعبر كيف أن سكان غيانا المقهورين طويلاً تحت وطأة الاحتلال والاستبداد يتسنى لهم أخيراً أن يجدوا صوتهم القوي الذي يعبر عن الآمهم وآمالهم، وأن يعيدوا صياغة تاريخهم بأنفسهم ويستعيدوا هويتهم الوطنية الأصيلة. وهكذا يمثل شعر كارتر خارطة طريق يهندي بها أبناء غيانا في طريق الكفاح الذي يسلكونه من أجل ردع قوى القهر والاحتلال، ودحر الغزاة المعتدين، واستعادة بلادهم من قبضة المحتل الغاشم.

الكلمات الدلالية: شعر، ما بعد الكولونيلية، مارتن كارتر

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